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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000340

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TAGS: PGOV PREL UN IV

SUBJECT: GBAGBO ISSUES DECREE NAMING SORO PRIME MINISTER

REF: ABIDJAN 333

Classified By: PolOff Laura Taylor-Kale, Reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a widely anticipated move, late evening March 29 President Gbagbo signed the decree naming ex-rebel New Forces (NF) leader Guillaume Soro the third Prime Minister of Cote d'Ivoire since the September 19, 2002 failed NF rebellion. The announcement has some renewed hope that a Soro-led government will bring presidential elections in 2008 and move the country towards peace and reconciliation. Little is known about the details of the power-sharing agreement that Gbagbo and Soro struck in the last week in Ouaga. Opposition parties have grudgingly supported the appointment and Abidjan awaits the announcement of a new government, which should be imminent. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) In a very brief decree, President Gbagbo invoked the constitution and the March 4 Ouagadougou Peace Accord (OPA) but made no mention of UNSC Resolution 1721 in nominating Guillaume Soro to be the third Prime Minister since the 2002 rebellion. The press and political operatives in Abidjan have discussed the President's intentions to appoint Soro since December. The announcement yesterday brought a sense of relief to Abidjan and some renewed sense of hope. After his March 29 afternoon meeting with Gbagbo in Abidjan, Soro promised to address the nation soon and announce the makeup of his new government. The opposition political parties announced their support of the Soro-led government in press statements on March 29. Banny himself has not resigned. According to the leading daily, state-owned Fraternite Matin, Banny failed to show up at the Presidential residence last night for an expected farewell call on President Gbagbo.

¶3. (C)) Close advisors say that Soro will split his time between Abidjan and Bouake so as not to appear to be too closely tied to the President; however, not much is actually known about the composition of the government or the agreement Soro and Gbagbo struck to ensure Soro's security and scope of power as Prime Minister. Embassy contacts in the UN mission and the political opposition have expressed serious concerns that Gbagbo and Soro have agreed to shut out the international community in the runup to elections in 2008. The ONUCI Political Affairs chief who was a participant in the Ouaga negotiations confirmed in a meeting with PolOff that Soro and Gbagbo have made off-the-table agreements not included in the text of the OPA, particularly with regard to elections. According to her, neither Soro nor Gbagbo want the international certification of elections to fall under the control of one person, the UN High Representative for Elections. She said they would try to remove the HRE and create an international observation group that will have significantly less influence and a weaker mandate than the current HRE.

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